

North Stars

Teacher Apprenticeship Program Addresses Critical Shortage of Educators in New Hampshire's North Country

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A little over a year ago, the New Hampshire State Board of Education declared attracting and retaining quality educators to be its number one priority. Teacher shortages are looming throughout New England. But in the rural northern tier of New Hampshire, the challenge of recruiting teachers is especially tough. While New Hampshire is the fastest-growing state in New England, the growth is mostly confined to the southern part of the state. Few new businesses locate in the North Country, and jobs are scarce. That makes it particularly difficult to attract married teachers whose spouses also may be looking for work. Moreover, until recent months, access to public higher education in the area was very limited.

Now, Plymouth State College has joined with the state university system's College for Lifelong Learning, the New Hampshire Community Technical Colleges and the North Country Superintendent's Association in launching an apprenticeship program to address the critical shortage of school personnel ranging from chemistry teachers to school psychologists.

The North Country initiative was born out of a partnership between Plymouth State College and Littleton, N.H., to improve student achievement by addressing the unique challenges North Country school districts face in terms of high teacher turnover and a shortage of qualified teaching candidates. Since

Plymouth State and the College for Lifelong Learning already have a presence in Littleton, and the Berlin campus of New Hampshire Community Technical College is just an hour north, education resources for teachers are already accessible. The collaborative effort between the institutions and the area superintendents increases flexibility and pre-service learning options for teachers.

With a \$59,000 grant from the New Hampshire Higher Education Assistance Foundation to Plymouth State, the initiative focuses on mentoring and pre-service learning to improve recruiting. With the assistance of the North Country Superintendents Association, the grant will establish a clearinghouse of available teaching opportunities in the North Country, help applicants find out about settling in the area and award stipends for teacher certification candidates who are committed to the program.

A program coordinator will be hired to oversee the program, collaborate with the superintendents and market and recruit students. This year, the North Country Superintendents participated in the state's Best Schools Initiative and began the discussion of the critical shortage of school personnel in the area. They outlined ways to build links between the apprenticeship program and local businesses and communities to support recruitment of teachers.

Under the program, students work through the College of Lifelong Learning and the technical colleges to complete their general education requirements, then transfer into Plymouth State's teacher certification program in elementary education, special education or core methodology for secondary education. Students complete much of their coursework at the College for Lifelong Learning's Littleton and

Education Occupations Facing Critical Shortages in New Hampshire

Acoustically Handicapped	Mathematics grades 5 – 12
Associate School Psychologist	Media Generalist
Chemistry	Mental Retardation
Emotionally Disturbed	Music
English as a Second Language	Physically Handicapped
Family and Consumer Science	Physics
Foreign Languages	Reading Specialist
General Special Education	School Psychologist
Guidance Counselor	Speech-Language Specialist
Learning Disabilities	Technology Education (Industrial Arts)
	Visually Handicapped

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Twin Mountain sites, and at the same time, work in North Country classrooms as paraprofessionals, substitute teachers, non-degree interns or certifiable instructors. With this classroom experience, the students complete their methods coursework and student teaching and are able to see links between education theory and daily practice.

The North Country apprenticeship program aims to meet the needs of children, communities and school districts, while offering a new way to provide teacher education programs onsite. Indeed, the mentoring program for new teachers can serve as a basis for a comprehensive statewide program, and the apprenticeship component may well set the stage for revising teacher preparation so that it is flexible, yet rigorous enough to ensure a high level of skills and knowledge.

Broad community and business support helps

ensure the initiative's viability. Good teachers, according to Parker Palmer in *The Courage to Teach*, possess a "capacity for connectedness," weaving a complex web of connections among themselves, their disciplines, their students and the community. The North Country initiative emphasizes the importance of building these connections.

Rural New Hampshire is not the only place in New England that faces special difficulties in attracting quality teachers. Local, state and national policymakers should look at alternatives like the North Country apprenticeship as they seek innovative ways to meet current and future shortages of qualified educators.

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Teachers' Helpers

Holyoke Community College offers a customized associate degree program in liberal arts with a concentration in education for about 45 high school-educated "paraprofessionals" who work as aides to teachers, particularly in special education and bilingual settings, in the Chicopee, Mass., Public Schools.

Principal Practice

In July, six prospective school principals from Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont began year-long internship programs through Keene State College and the Providence, R.I.-based Big Picture Co., which matches the aspiring principals with established principals who serve as mentors and provide practical experience.

Violence

Students were the victims of about 255,000 incidents of serious violent crime while at school in 1996 alone, and teachers themselves were the victims of 124,000 violent crimes, according to the latest U.S. Department of Education data. The Bush administration has proposed tying federal safe schools funds to states adopting a zero-tolerance policy toward violent or persistently disruptive students. At the request of Gateway

Regional School District in western Massachusetts, Holyoke Community College developed a one-credit course to help teachers better handle aggressive and violent students.

Low Profiles

Education schools are under the gun to improve teacher quality. In a report to the State Higher Education Executive Officers, Rand Corp. Senior Advisor P. Michael Timpane wrote of education schools: "They are tolerated but not honored by other schools and faculties on campus. ... They make few strident demands for either attention or resources."

Teacher Mills?

The new *Bears' Guide to the Best Education Degrees by Distance Learning* lists 100 "top-notch" programs that it says "offer fully accredited education degrees and teaching certificates that can be earned by mail, on video, and increasingly over the Internet." The pitch from the directory's Berkeley, Calif., publishing house: "Traditional means for improving or gaining teaching skills can be time-consuming and costly, making it difficult for teachers and aspiring teachers to take their skills to the next level. Distance learning is quickly becoming a sensible and accessible solution."